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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

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INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LONDON 16830

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE: AN ASSESSMENT

REFERENCE: A) LONDON 15830; B) LONDON 16003;

C) LONDON 16059; D) LONDON 16163; E) LONDON 16189

SUMMARY: AS A RESULT OF ITS 1976 PARTY CONFERENCE AT BRIGHTON, THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY SEEMS TO BE MORE UNIFIED BEHIND ITS LEADER MARGARET THATCHER, HEATH SEEMS TO BE BACK IN THE FOLD (SOMEWHAT), AND THE PARTY HAS ENDORSED ITS NEW STRATEGY DOCUMENT, "THE RIGHT APPROACH."

MRS. THATCHER, HEATH AND PRIOR ALL TOUCHED AT VARIOUS TIMES UPON THE PARTY'S RELATIONS WITH THE TRADE UNIONS:

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CONFRONTATION IS DROPPED, CONSULTATION IS ADOPTED, AND

CONSERVATIVES WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE TRADE UNIONS ARE URGED TO BECOME ACTIVE IN THEIR UNIONS. ALL IN ALL, BRIGHTON REPRESENTS AN ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE PARTY IN DEMONSTRATING A GREATER DEGREE OF READINESS AND ENTHUSIASM FOR AN ELECTION, BETTER MANAGEMENT OF PARTY AFFAIRS, AND STRONGER PERFORMANCES BY MEMBERS OF THE SHADOW CABINET. END SUMMARY

1. THE 1976 CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE HELD IN BRIGHTON OCTOBER 5-8 WAS A SUCCESS ON SEVERAL COUNTS. IN SPITE OF (AND PERHAPS PARTLY BECAUSE OF) VERY POOR ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELEGATES AND BAD ACOUSTICS, THE CONFERENCE HAD A VITALITY FREQUENTLY MISSING FROM CONSERVATIVE ASSEMBLIES. AS THINGS TURNED OUT, THE CONFERENCE CAME, FOR THE PARTY'S PURPOSES, AT A VERY PROPITIOUS TIME: IMMEDIATELY ON THE HEELS OF LABOR'S CONFERENCE AT BLACKPOOL AT WHICH THE LEFT OSTENTATIOUSLY AGAIN SHOWED ITS MUSCLE, AND DURING A PERIOD OF GRAVE NATIONAL CONCERN OVER THE NATION'S ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE SLIDE IN THE INTERNATIONAL VALUE OF THE POUND.

2. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE PARTY'S DECISION TO ISSUE A "MINI-MANIFESTO" JUST DAYS BEFORE THE CONFERENCE PROVED POLITICALLY ASTUTE. "THE RIGHT APPROACH" PROVIDED CONFERENCE DELEGATES WITH A RESTATEMENT OF PARTY POLICIES ON A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES, GAVE THE PARTY A LOT OF PREDOMINANTLY FAVORABLE, FREE PRE-CONFERENCE PUBLICITY, AND SERVED UP A LOT OF PARTY-APPROVED BOILERPLATE TO WHICH DELEGATES AND PODIUM SPEAKERS ALIKE COULD PIOUSLY REFER. "THE RIGHT APPROACH" PROVIDED THE CONFERENCE WITH A THEMATIC CONSISTENCY THAT CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCES HAVE SO OFTEN LACKED; THE PARTY'S POLICIES APPEAR MORE MODERATE THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED. THUS, THE DECISION TO ISSUE THE DOCUMENT SHOWED EX POST FACTO THAT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP (PRIMARILY ANGUS MAUDE) WAS (A) WILLING TO TAKE A CHANCE, (B) ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES OUTSIDE THE PARTY'S DIRECT CONTROL, AND (C) JUST MIGHT BE SHOWING THEY WERE GETTING A TOUCH OF THE "POLITICAL SMARTS."

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3. PREVIOUS CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCES, ESPECIALLY LAST YEAR'S AT BLACKPOOL, HAVE BEEN DOMINATED BY RITUAL. CONFERENCES IN THE PAST HAVE BEEN A GATHERING OF THE CLAN TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE LEADER, TO LISTEN TO SERMONS FROM THE MOUNT, TO SOCIALIZE AND SEE OLD FRIENDS, TO BASK IN CONSERVATIVENESS AND, ON OCCASION, TO BE INSPIRED TO GREATER PARTY LOYALTY AND HARD WORK. BRIGHTON THIS YEAR HAD SOME OF ALL OF THIS, BUT A BIT MORE AS WELL.

4. AS WELL AS FOR "THE RIGHT APPROACH," BRIGHTON WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR TED HEATH'S REAPPROACH TO THE PARTY AND TO ITS CURRENT LEADER. THE PARTY AT LARGE HAS BEEN PUZZLED BY THE ABSENCE OF ANY PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION ON HIS PART OF LOYALTY TO MRS. THATCHER AND CONFUSED BY MEDIA SPECULATION (TO WHICH HE HAS SOMETIMES BEEN A PARTY) OF DIVISION OF THE PARTY INTO THATCHERITE AND HEATHITE WINGS. HEATH OF COURSE KNEW THAT HE WAS CHOOSING THE RIGHT AUDIENCE FOR HIS CEREMONIAL ACT; CONSERVATIVE CONSTITUENCIES HAD OVER-

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WHELMINGLY SUPPORTED HIS REELECTION AS LEADER IN 1975 AND FELT MIFFED THAT THEIR VIEWS HAD NOT BEEN ACCORDED MUCH WEIGHT BY THE CONSERVATIVE MPS WHO DISELECTED HIM. HE STILL HAS TREMENDOUS RESERVOIRS OF RESPECT AND ADMIRATION IN THE GROUP OF AGENTS, CONSTITUENCY OFFICIALS, AND ORDINARY PARTY MEMBERS WHO MAKE UP THE BULK OF CONFERENCE DELEGATES.

5. HOPING FOR SOME ACT OF RECONCILIATION ON HIS PART, THE CONFERENCE DELEGATES RESPONDED ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO HIS VERY MINIMAL GOOD WORDS ABOUT MRS. THATCHER AND THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. THEY ALSO NOTED THE GRACE AND, FOR
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HIM, UNUSUAL WIT WITH WHICH HE ACCEPTED "THE RIGHT APPROACH" AS A USEFUL RESTATEMENT OF CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES WITH WHICH, IN THE MAIN, HE COULD CONCUR. THEY ALSO WERE GRATEFUL THAT HEATH, AFTER A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AND DRAMATIC EXPOSITION OF BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC CRISIS, DID NOT, REPEAT NOT, OFFER COALITION AS A CURE OR EVEN MENTION, AS HE HAD IN OCTOBER 1974, A "GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION." THIS CONFERENCE DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT COALITION OR NATIONAL UNION; THEY WANTED TO HEAR ABOUT THE EVILS OF SOCIALISM, A DIVIDED LABOR PARTY, THE "RIGHTNESS" OF CONSERVATIVE POLICIES, AND A CONSERVATIVE RETURN TO POWER AT THE NEXT ELECTION.

6. HOW RECONCILED HEATH REALLY IS REMAINS TO BE SEEN. WHAT HE DID DO IN BRIGHTON WAS TO GO FAR ENOUGH IN EXPRESSING ACCEPTANCE OF MRS. THATCHER'S LEADERSHIP AND "THE RIGHT APPROACH" AS TO LIMIT HIS USEFULNESS TO THE TROUBLEMAKERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE PARTY, WHO HAVE RELISHED THE IDEA OF AN IDEOLOGICAL AND PERSONALITY CONFLICT WITHIN THE PARTY. FOR HIM TO GO FURTHER AND ACCEPT A SHADOW CABINET POSITION AT THIS TIME IS PERHAPS ASKING TOO MUCH, THOUGH MRS. THATCHER MAY WELL SUGGEST IT IN CONNECTION WITH SHADOW CABINET CHANGES SHE IS REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING AND BEING URGED TO MAKE. WHAT IS PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT ABOUT THE PATCHING OVER OF THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THATCHER AND HEATH, HOWEVER THIN, IS THAT IT OPENS UP OTHER POSSIBILITIES IN BRINGING BACK HEATH SUPPORTERS LIKE PETER WALKER, GEOFFREY RIPPON, AND PAUL CHANNON, INTO SHADOW CABINET RESPONSIBILITIES.

7. HEATH PROVIDED A BIT OF DRAMA WHICH POLITICAL CONFERENCES BADLY NEED. MICHAEL HESELTINE PROVIDED THE THEATRE. WITH HESELTINE, ONE COULD ONLY ADMIRE THE TECHNIQUE, THE MANIPULATION OF THE ASSEMBLY. IT WAS HOW HE SAID IT, RATHER THAN WHAT HE SAID. CAPITALIZING ON HIS REPUTATION FOR DIRECT AGGRESSIVENESS IN ATTACKING THE LEFT (AS PER

THE MACE INCIDENT), HESELTINE MASTERED THE ACOUSTICS OF THE HALL AND CAPTURED THE AUDIENCE IN A WAY NO OTHER SPEAKER DID. THE DELEGATES RESPONDED AND SEEMED TO BE SENDING AN OPEN MESSAGE TO MRS. THATCHER: DON'T TAKE OUR MICHAEL AWAY.

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8. ANOTHER MESSAGE THE CONFERENCE SENT TO MRS. THATCHER WAS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE: GET RID OF MAUDLING. ONE DELEGATE SPEAKING FROM THE MICROPHONE SAID OPENLY THAT MAUDLING SHOULD EITHER BECOME A REAL SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR THE PARTY OR HE SHOULD DEPART IN PEACE HE WAS THE ONLY FRONT BENCH SPOKESMAN TO BE SO ATTACKED. MAUDLING PROCEEDED THEREAFTER WITHOUT A BLUSH TO GIVE ONE OF HIS BETTER SPEECHES. IT WAS DISPASSIONATE, REASONED, ELEVATED IN TONE, AND LARGELY UNAPPRECIATED BY THE CONFERENCE. THERE WAS LITTLE IN THE SPEECH OR IN THE CONFERENCE'S RECEPTION OF IT THAT WILL ENCOURAGE MRS. THATCHER TO KEEP MAUDLING IN THE SHADOW CABINET IN THE SAME PORTFOLIO, AND HIS NAME CONTINUES TO FIGURE IN ALL THE SPECULATION ABOUT A RESHUFFLE OF CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.

9. MRS. THATCHER'S OWN SPEECH WHICH WOUND UP THE CONFERENCE WAS SOMEWHAT OF A LET-DOWN. THE MINIMUM THE CONFERENCE WAS EXPECTING WAS A REPEAT OF THE VIRTUOSO PERFORMANCE AT BLACKPOOL LAST YEAR, WHEN SPEAKING FOR THE FIRST TIME AS LEADER AT A CONFERENCE, SHE HAD ELECTRIFIED AND THRILLED THE CONFERENCE WITH A DEMONSTRATION OF ORATORICAL SKILLS, TIMING, HUMOR, AND A PENCHANT FOR PUNCHY JABS AT THE LABOR GOVERNMENT. SHE CHOSE A DIFFERENT TACK THIS YEAR WHICH MOST DELEGATES DAMNED WITH FAINT PRAISE; ABANDONING A RALLYING CALL TO THE PARTY, SHE ELEVATED HER SIGHTS TO THE NATION AT LARGE, CALLING UPON THE NATION TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTNESS OF CONSERVATIVE POSITIONS IN THE ATTACK UPON THE EVILS OF SOCIALISM IN THE CRISIS FACING

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BRITAIN. THOUGH WARMLY APPLAUDED AT THE END, SHE WAS ONLY INFREQUENTLY INTERRUPTED BY APPLAUSE OR LAUGHTER. BUT HER WILLINGNESS TO TAKE A DIFFERENT TACK, PERHAPS ONLY AFTER HEATH'S SPEECH, DEMONSTRATES A GROWING SELF-CONFIDENCE AND AN AWARENESS ON HER PART THAT THE PARTY MORE THAN JUST TOLERATES HER AS LEADER. THIS WAS COM-POUNDED AFTER HER SPEECH IN THE "TOUCHING-OF-THE-HEM" RITES AS SHE MINGLED WITH DELEGATES.

10. MUCH ON HER MIND AT THE END OF THE CONFERENCE WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S AGREEMENT TO A ONE-DAY DEBATE OCTOBER 11 ON THE ECONOMY. THE THUNDER AND LIGHTNING MISSING IN HER CONFIDENTIAL

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SPEECH AT BRIGHTON CAME FORTH IN HER SPEECH DURING THE DEBATE IN WESTMINSTER, PROBABLY HER BEST PARLIAMENTARY EFFORT TO DATE, WHICH WAS GIVEN A STANDING OVATION BY HER BACK-BENCHERS.

11. ON THEMES, BRIGHTON OFFERED UP A LOT OF EXPOSITION OF POLICIES OUTLINED IN "THE RIGHT APPROACH;" THE ONLY CRITICISM MADE OF THE NEW DOCUMENT WAS THAT IT WAS NOT ALWAYS PRECISE ENOUGH AND, IN SOME INSTANCES, NOT TOUGH ENOUGH. GEOFFREY HOWE MADE A BETTER SPEECH THAN HE USUALLY DOES ON THE ECONOMY; THE CONFERENCE SAT THROUGH HIS SPEECH LIKE A CLASS LISTENING TO A UNIVERSITY DON AND THIS IS PERHAPS COMFORTABLE FOR HIM IN COMPARISON WITH THE SOMETIMES RAUCOUS ATMOSPHERE OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. WHITELAW OATMEALD HIS WAY THROUGH A DEBATE AND SPEECH ON IMMIGRATION WHICH SEEMED ALWAYS ABOUT TO GET OUT OF CONTROL ON WHAT HAS INCREASINGLY BECOME FOR CONSERVATIVES A HIGHLY EMOTIVE ISSUE; THE CONSERVATIVES NOW DEMAND A LIMITATION ON FURTHER IMMIGRATION THROUGH REGISTRATION OF ALL PRESENT DEPENDENTS OF IMMIGRANTS IN BRITAIN AND CONTROL OVER FUTURE FIANCEES AND THE LIKE. AT THE SAME TIME, WHITELAW CALLS FOR JUSTICE (I.E., NO DISCRIMINATION) FOR THOSE IMMIGRANTS ALREADY A PART OF BRITISH SOCIETY, AND THE PARTY IS OBVIOUSLY BUSY IN TRYING TO MAKE INROADS IN VARIOUS IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY THE ASIAN AND WEST INDIAN. WHITELAW ALSO COMMITTED THE PARTY TO OPPOSE THE REPATRIATION SCHEME RECENTLY PROPOSED BY CONSERVATIVE-PARIAH ENOCH POWELL, WHO CONTINUES TO BE POPULAR WITH A SMALL GROUP OF CONSERVATIVES.

12. THERE WAS A LOT OF TALK ABOUT THE CONSERVATIVE STANCE TOWARD THE TRADE UNIONS. JAMES PRIOR, SHADOW SPOKESMAN FOR EMPLOYMENT, NEATLY PUT THE ONUS ON THE TRADE UNIONS TO SHOW THAT THEY WOULD WORK WITH THE ONCOMING CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. HEATH AND THATCHER BOTH MADE FAVORABLE NOISES ABOUT WHAT GOOD FELLOWS THE TRADE UNIONISTS ARE AND HOW RESPONSIBLE THEY HAVE BEEN. GONE WAS ANY OVERT MENTION OF "CONFRONTATION" WITH THE TRADE UNIONS, THOUGH MRS. THATCHER SAID THAT TRADE UNIONISTS SHOULD KNOW THEIR PLACE AND, IF THEY WANT TO GOVERN, SHOULD STAND FOR

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ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT RATHER THAN WORK OUT DEALS WITH THEIR LABOR PARTY COLLEAGUES. PRIOR ALSO SOFTENED AGAIN THE PARTY'S PREVIOUS FIRM OPPOSITION TO THE CLOSED SHOP AS SUCH BUT STRESSED THAT AN INDIVIDUAL SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN OUTSIDE A UNION FOR REASONS OF CONSCIENCE. THE PARTY IS ALSO COMMITTED TO GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MAIL BALLOTS IN UNION ELECTIONS, HOPING THIS WILL PRODUCE MODERATE RATHER THAN RADICAL TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP. ON ANOTHER ISSUE RELATED TO THE TRADE UNIONS, CONSERVATIVES WERE ENCOURAGED IN BLACKPOOL LAST YEAR TO BECOME ACTIVE MEMBERS AND SEEK LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THEIR OWN TRADE UNIONS; THE CONFERENCE AT BRIGHTON PRODUCED SOME

EVIDENCE THAT SOMETHING IS BEING ACCOMPLISHED IN THIS AREA.

13. OTHER THEMES OF THE CONFERENCE WERE: MORE LAW AND MORE ORDER, BETTER EDUCATION (A GROWING INTEREST ON THE PARTY'S PART IN IMPROVING COMPREHENSIVES), SALE OF COUNCIL HOUSING, INCREASED SECURITY IN ULSTER, IMPROVE BRITAIN'S DEFENSES, SUPPORT FREE ENTERPRISE, BETTER SOCIAL SERVICES AND CUT DOWN ON ABUSES, ETC. THE FRINGE EVENTS OF THE CONFERENCE INCLUDED A SOBER AND PHILOSOPHICAL LOOK AT THREE MAIN PROBLEMS FACING BRITAIN BY RISING CONSERVATIVE MP JOHN BIFFEN: ULSTER, DEVOLUTION IN SCOTLAND AND WALES, THE NEW ON-COMING MULTIRACIAL SOCIETY OF BRITAIN AND THE STRESS AND STRAINS IT PRODUCES ON URBAN LIFE. THERE WAS AN EVENING DEBATE ON IMMIGRATION FEATURING A PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE (A PAKISTANI), A CONSERVATIVE PROSPECTIVE QC (INDIAN), AND A WEST INDIAN. ANOTHER EVENING DEBATE FEATURED TWO SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE MPS, ONE PASSIONATELY DEVOTED TO DEVOLUTION AND THE OTHER AS

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PASSIONATELY AGAINST; PEACE ON THE CONFERENCE FLOOR HAD DICTATED NO DEVOLUTION DEBATE WHICH HAD FRUSTRATED THE VISITING SCOTTISH MPS AS WELL AS THE ENGLISH AND WELSH DELEGATES WHO SEEMED IN THE MAIN OPPOSED TO DEVOLUTION. THERE WERE ALSO FRINGE EVENTS ON EDUCATION, SCHOOLING, HOUSING, URBAN PROBLEMS, DEFENSE, AND AN APPEARANCE BY SOVIET DISSIDENT AMALRIK. SOME OF THESE EVENTS WERE PACKED AND, IF FUTURE CONFERENCES DON'T PRODUCE LIVELIER DEBATES AND MORE CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS, THE FRINGE WILL BE INCREASINGLY CALLED UPON TO PROVIDE THE ZEST AND SPARKLE.

14. A TRIAL BALLOON IN THE BRIGHTON CONFERENCE WAS A CONFIDENTIAL

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FREE DEBATE IN WHICH WOULD-BE SPEAKERS PUT IN THEIR NAMES WITH THE TOPIC THEY WISHED TO SPEAK ON. AS A RESULT, THE CONFERENCE GOT ITS ONLY MENTION OF DEVOLUTION (WITH SCOTTISH SPEAKERS STRONGLY FOR IT), A FEW ESSAYS ON THE NEED FOR A BILL OF RIGHTS AND THE LIKE, AND A SPARKLING AND ELEGANT RESPONSE FROM LORD CARRINGTON.

15. EMBASSY IS FORWARDING COPIES OF SPEECHES (HEATH, MAUDLING, THATCHER, ETC.) TO DEPARTMENT (EUR/NE).

16. COMMENT: BRIGHTON MARKED A STEP FORWARD FOR THE CONSERVATIVES IN DEMONSTRATING A GREATER DEGREE OF UNIFIED SUPPORT FOR MRS. THATCHER AND FOR THE MINI-MANIFESTO. BRIGHTON WAS A DISTINCT IMPROVEMENT OVER BLACKPOOL LAST YEAR, SHOWING A PARTY WHICH IS BETTER ORGANIZED AND LED, SCENTING THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONSERVATIVE VICTORY AT THE NEXT ELECTION.

17. BRIGHTON WAS NOT INTENDED, EXCEPT IN MRS. THATCHER'S SPEECH, TO GO BEYOND THE PARTY TO APPEAL TO THE WIDER ELECTORATE. BUT, WITH A GENERALLY ACCEPTED STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES (OR POLICIES), THE PARTY IS IN FAR BETTER SHAPE AFTER BRIGHTON TO MAKE SUCH AN APPEAL. THE CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD DO WELL IN AN ELECTION CALLED IN THE NEAR FUTURE; THE UPCOMING BY-ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR EARLY NOVEMBER, EVEN THOUGH FOR SEATS HELD BY IMPRESSIVE LABOR MAJORITIES, WILL GIVE AN OPPORTUNITY

FOR A POST-CONFERENCE ASSESSMENT OF THE PARTY'S APPEAL.

18. THE COMBINATION OF BRIGHTON WITH THE ECONOMIC DEBATE OCTOBER 11 CLEARLY SHOWS THE DILEMMA THE CONSERVATIVES ARE IN. THEY ARE UNABLE TO DEFEAT THE GOVERNMENT ON A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE WITHOUT (A) A COMPLETE CONSERVATIVE CONTINGENT, (B) COMPLETE SUPPORT FROM OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES (LIBERALS, SCOT NATS, PLAID CYMRU, ULSTER), AND (C) HELPFUL ABSENCES OR ABSTENTIONS FROM THE LABOR RANKS. THE MATHEMATICS OF THE HOUSE ARE AGAINST THE CONSERVATIVE AT THIS TIME AND THE UPCOMING BY-ELECTIONS DO NOT SUGGEST THAT THEIR POSITION WILL BE MATERIALLY IMPROVED.

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